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ABSTRACT

An organizational framework consisting of the following four components is useful in exploring questions about improving textbooks: learner characteristics, learning activities, the critical task (for measuring student performance), and the nature of the materials. In considering learning characteristics and the materials, it is important to remember the crucial transition for children from basal reader prose to the prose in content area textbooks. In a study focusing on children's interest in social studies textbooks, it was shown that children find these texts uninteresting and difficult. This may be because their textbooks do not foster the learning skills necessary for understanding and remembering information. Some fundamental changes thus need to take place concerning what content area textbooks should be. Rhetorical textbooks that use metadiscourse to convey both content information and the author's attitudes toward it may advance the goals of learning from written texts and producing texts. Striking text differences between conventional and unconventional textbooks emphasize the need for an indepth study in order to improve the quality of all textbooks for children, not just those in social studies. (DF)

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The Case for a Rhetorical Perspective on Learning from Texts: Exploring Metadiscourse

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The Case for a Rhetorical Perspective on Learning from Texts: Exploring Metadiscourse

Introduction to the Problem

The National Commission on Excellence in Education in its report titled, "A Nation at Risk," and Education Secretary Bell in a speech to school administrators, have both implied that questions about improving textbooks must be asked and answered. They believe that without an upgrading of textbook quality, the goal of educational reform--the crusade to raise school standards--will falter, fall flat, and fail (Connell, 1984). But answers to these implied questions can only be found through empirical research.

Important questions about how people learn from texts are being asked by experts in content area reading today in response to the national demands to improve the quality of education (Singer & Bean, 1983). An organizational framework consisting of four components has been developed which can be useful for exploring these questions about learning from texts (Jenkins, 1979). The components consist of: (1) characteristics of the learner (i.e., the learner's mental abilities, attitudes, personality traits, and temporary mental states); (2) learning activities engaged in by the learner (i.e., the strategies, procedures, or self-monitoring that learners use); (3) criterial task, the task used to measure student performance (i.e., summarizing or recalling details, following directions, or answering text-based questions); (4) nature of the materials (i.e., structure, logical content, cohesion, and explicit meaning cues). A complete comprehensive model of how learners learn from texts requires further exploration of all four components and their interactions. The exploration in this work, however, is limited to the nature of the

materials (the text characteristics), the learner characteristics, and their interactions.

Statement of the Problem

Both content area educators and parents have several goals for children: (1) to learn how to learn the content (and then learn it) and (2) to develop positive attitudes toward the learning and the content. But children have trouble in both areas.

One of the most important milestones for children in their early school years is making the transition from the narrative and expository texts in their basal readers to the kind of expository texts found in their content area textbooks. Some children perform well with narrative texts but poorly with expository texts, especially textbooks, and some children perform poorly with both kinds (Spiro & Taylor, in press; 1980). Apparently, the transition from basal readers to social studies textbooks is particularly difficult, as documented from several sources: Evidence comes from classroom observation, teacher-student interviews, and parent surveys (Crismore, 1981), large scale assessment tests of progress in social studies, reading comprehension, and writing (NAEP, 1978), and empirical studies (Dixon, 1978). Children frequently have problems with identifying the author's main ideas and biases. A typical social studies textbook chapter was analyzed to determine the extent to which it did or did not exhibit the characteristics of a rhetorically appropriate text (Crismore, 1982). The analysis found that the chapter did not have an explicit global thematic idea which affected unity and coherence, and had multiple topics resulting in abrupt topic shifts and discontinuities for the readers. The chapter had few explicit meaning clues, and the ones that

were used were often misleading. The chapter had no explicit summary or preview at the beginning or end of the chapter or sections within the chapter. Empirical research has examined the effects on learners of characteristics of expository prose, such as implicit and explicit logical relationships of high and low level ideas, topic continuity, examples, and text patterns (Schallert & Tierney, 1982), or the organization of prose and signaling (e.g., Meyer, 1975; Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980; Taylor, 1983), and found these rhetorical structures to influence learning.

Specialists in social studies, as well as parents and educators, consider it important for children to develop positive attitudes toward social studies and the reading and writing of social studies texts (Mikulecky, 1977; Daly, in press; Tierney & Crismore, 1983). Yet students find social studies dull and uninteresting and therefore do little or no social studies reading beyond the required textbook assignments (Fitzgerald, 1979), and do almost no social studies writing (Appleby, 1981). In order to develop positive attitudes toward social studies, including a desire to read and write about it, students need textbooks that they find interesting and engaging.

In a study of social studies textbooks in sixth grade classrooms (Crismore, 1981), students often reported that "My social studies textbook is like climbing a mountain - both are hard to do and boring." "It is not like our reading book - that's my favorite." "Sometimes it's confusing when the book doesn't tell you what you need to know for the questions." Teachers reported, "My students can't read the textbooks - I paraphrase it." "We don't really use textbooks very much." It was observed in the classrooms that students tended to be distracted easily, or to do something

other than use the textbook when they found the book too confusing, uninteresting, non-informative, or too complex in language or concepts.

When asked to give their criteria for an ideal social studies textbook, students and parents seemed more in agreement than students and teachers, while teachers and administrators seemed to agree closely. Both parents and students saw interestingness (fun, exciting, stimulating) as primary as the information in an ideal textbook. Values, feelings and aesthetics were very important. They seemed to view the textbook more as a literary work of art that also informed in a friendly, cooperative, reader-based manner. The affective aspects were as important as the cognitive aspects. The psychological, qualitative, rhetorical factors were balanced with facts, content, and skills.

Teachers and administrators, however, seemed, in general, to see the textbook primarily as a non-literary piece of informative expository prose. They perceived the ideal textbook to be well-organized, informative and appropriate in context according to school objectives, readable on or below grade level, and systematic. They were not much concerned about interestingness, style, and feelings but instead had a more objective, scientific, and less integrated perception of the ideal textbook in general.

It seems clear from this study that children find their present textbooks both uninteresting and difficult to understand and that there are mismatches between what parents and students and teachers and administrators perceive as criteria for an ideal social studies textbook.

One of the reasons that children find reading and writing social studies texts so uninteresting and difficult may be that their textbooks do not foster the skills needed for learning. Because the amount and

complexity of social studies reading and writing steadily increases throughout the grades, it is important that children acquire the skills they need to understand and remember the information presented in their textbooks as early in their schooling as possible. To do this, they need textbooks with text characteristics that foster these skills.

If authors, publishers, and educators intend that textbooks not only survive, but also increase in use and effectiveness, then some fundamental changes may need to take place concerning the notion of what a content-area textbook should be. It may be that the present social studies textbooks, because of certain text characteristics, are uninteresting to students, not only causing them to read less but also making it less likely that they will understand the significance of what the authors/editors are saying, or perceive the textbook as a model for their own content writing. In addition, it may be that some children approach social studies reading and writing with a great deal of anxiety because of unfamiliarity with the topics or the structure of social studies expository prose. Perhaps these anxious children need a textbook quite different from their present ones in order to reach their potential in social studies.

Although social studies textbooks have been emphasized in this paper, they are only examples. What is said about social studies textbooks applies to most other textbooks, and to computer software as well.

Rhetorical Textbooks as a Solution

Speech communication theorists (Ehninger, Monroe, Gronbeck, 1978; Bradley, 1981) have defined rhetorical characteristics of texts that may advance the goals of learning from written texts, and producing written texts.

Broadly defined, rhetoric is the use or discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or move an audience, whether that audience is made up of a single person or group of persons (Corbett, 1971). Rhetoric has traditionally been concerned with formal, planned, sustained monologues, speech events in which a single person seeks to exert an effect on an audience. Having an effect on a listener or reader is the very essence of rhetorical discourse. In classical rhetoric, the particular effect of rhetorical discourse was narrowed to persuasion, but modern rhetoricians have broadened the effects to include expository modes of discourse which seek to produce acceptance of information or explanation. Cronkhite (1978) defines rhetoric as the study of the effects of the discursive correlates of belief, with belief understood to include both comprehension and acceptance.

There are a number of effective rhetorical text characteristics that may advance the goals, including point of view, unity, coherence, structure, development, emphasis, tone, learner appropriateness, an author/learner relationship, and author credibility and personality. Speech communication theorists suggest that communication can be enhanced by having a rather elaborate preview and/or introduction to the material to be read, together with an explicitly stated purpose/goal. They would also include a discourse topic, controlling idea or thesis for the discourse topic, a rationale or justification for the controlling idea, theses, purpose or goals and main ideas (in other words, a complete communication plan for the text), a body and a conclusion. Because young children's learning may be limited by their memory and lack of prior knowledge about academic oral and written texts, these characteristics are considered particularly critical for them.

Speech communication theorists and researchers are concerned with these text characteristics because they study oral texts from a rhetorical perspective. The question to be considered, then, is whether presently available social studies textbooks have rhetorical characteristics, and if they do not, whether that may be one reason for their failure to have the positive effects on students we would like them to have. A textbook which does show these characteristics will be referred to as a rhetorical textbook. A rhetorical textbook would be one that communicates both the desired content information and the author's attitudes toward it. It reflects a concern not only for the message but also for how it is presented, the message source (the author), and the message receivers (the readers). Extrapolating from speech communication, it is hypothesized that a rhetorical social studies text would result in more effective communication of ideas, the development of more positive attitudes, and a model that children could use when they write about social studies for teachers or peers. It is imperative that textbook style be investigated as a factor in the development of reading and writing abilities, anxieties, and attitudes.

Metadiscourse as a Rhetorical Device

Metadiscourse can be defined as the rhetorical act of discoursing about the discourse. Some authors have a style of discourse that has only propositional content. This level of discourse is called primary level discourse. Primary level discourse is the message itself without any comments by the author about the message or the presentation of the message, and it has referential and expressive functions. Primary level discourse is seen in this sentence: With the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, it became common to regard all change as change for the better,

or progress. Other authors, however, have a style that has another level of discourse added to the primary level. This second level of discourse is called metadiscourse - a discourse about the primary level discourse. Metadiscourse is a content-less level of discourse that adds nothing to the propositional content. An example of metadiscourse is the underlined portion of this sentence: My main point is that not all change is progress.

Primary discourse and metadiscourse have separate linguistic systems. Metadiscourse calls attention to the communicative speech act itself, seeks to engage the reader as an active human being, and signals the presence of the author. An author's presence in a text is a manifestation of the interpersonal function of language (Halliday & Hasan, 1975):

The interpersonal component is concerned with the social, expressive and conative functions of language, with expressing the speaker's angle: his attitudes and judgments, his encoding of the role relationships into the situation, and his motive in saying anything at all. We can summarize these by saying that the ideational component represents the speaker in his role as observer, while the interpersonal component represents the speaker in his role as intruder. (pp. 26-27).

There are two types of metadiscourse: informational and attitudinal. Informational metadiscourse consists of explicit rhetorical devices that signal the presence of an author. These explicit rhetorical devices are attached to the primary discourse in previews and reviews or are attached to and inserted in the proposition of the primary discourse. Their function is referential or ideational, that is, to make the author's plans for structure and content explicit. They include the devices identified by speech communication scholars as necessary for effective communication:

explicitly stated author purposes, aims, and goals; a superordinate statement consisting of a single discourse topic and the comment or predication the author is making about the discourse topic (called the thesis, controlling idea, topic or main idea statement); a justification or rationale statement concerning the superordinate statement; and esplicit statements labeling the discourse as an argument, description, exposition, directions, naming the presentation strategies and partitions for the primary discourse; or announcing topic shifts. An example of informational metadiscourse is the underlined part of this sentence: I am arguing that it is not progress to produce more and more goods.

Attitudinal metadiscourse consists of rhetorical devices that signal the author's attitude about the propositional content itself (using words such as interestingly, amazingly, fortunately) or about how true or certain the propositional content is (true, probably, uncertain). The rhetorical devices used to convey author attitudes and comments include pronouns for self-reference or reader reference (I, you); mental state and process verbs (feel, think, realize, know, conclude, argue); and adverbs or adverbial constructions that qualify the whole sentence, rather than a part of the sentence (it is true that, probably, naturally). An example of attitudinal metadiscourse is the underlined part of these sentences: It is possible that it is not progress to be the biggest or go the fastest. Naturally, not all people agree with this notion.

Metadiscourse devices can be on the word, phrase, or clause level and can signal the overt or covert presence of an author. The degree and type of metadiscourse use varies, depending on the rhetorical situation (author, reader, subject matter, occasion, and genre).

Metadiscourse Studies

Only two studies of metadiscourse are known to exist, one a discourse analysis of metadiscourse in conversation and the other an empirical study of retention of metadiscourse in expository paragraphs.

Sociolinguistic researchers have studied conversational discourse to identify text characteristics and effects in communicative situations. Schiffrin (1980) found that many conversations allow talk to emerge as a subtopic within ongoing talk about something else. This she refers to as meta-talk. She found with conversations about some other topic, the existence of metalinguistic expressions such as (That's what I meant), (I'm telling you that . . .) (I'm arguing that . . .) She identified three indicators of meta-talk: (1) metalinguistic referents, (2) operators, and (3) verbs.

The clearest case of meta-linguistic referents is when the entity referred to is something in the language per se--words, phrases, clauses, or sentences--and when its relevant attributes are those characterizing it as an element of language. Also included are terms of discourse deixis and demonstrative pronouns (there, here; this, that) when they refer to items in the text. A second indication of meta-talk is meta-linguistic operators. Schiffrin states that "operators indicate either the modification or the combination of propositions into more complex forms in ways that parallel logical operations." Examples of these operators are true, false, right, wrong, mean, like, and for example. Since true, false, right, and wrong as metalinguistic operators have propositions in the text as their arguments, they can be considered higher level predicates. (It is true that X is the case.) Metalinguistic operators such as the verb mean are higher level predicates that require two textual propositions as

arguments. (This means that X is the case.) Meta-linguistic verbs are the third indicator of meta-talk. Meta-linguistic expressions include those things that people do with language; there is a vocabulary with which to talk about speech. "One group of meta-linguistic verbs names acts of speech: verbs of saying, such as say, tell, ask, and assert. Other verbs indicate that something will be done to a piece of talk: clarify and define, for example. And still others name speech events, for example, argue and joke." (p. 230). Meta-talk, Schiffrin notes, has varying scope which, along with its location and its function, "can be discovered by examining the linguistic context and the conversational discourse in which it occurs."

Schiffrin's analyses show that meta-talk, as well as talk, is used for both referential and expressive ends. "Meta-talk functions on a referential, informational plane when it serves as an organizational bracket, and on an expressive, symbolic plane when it serves as an evaluative bracket." (p. 231) There are other organizational and evaluative devices, but the metalinguistic device is an important one.

Metalinguistic clauses often indicate the boundaries of a discourse unit such as a narrative or explanation. Discourse units have, then, an internal structure that distinguishes them from surrounding talk and have external boundaries called metalinguistic discourse brackets. Discourse brackets, such as abstracts and codas for narratives, are not metalinguistic. Instead they are considered nonmetalinguistic devices. Some metalinguistic brackets come in pairs, but not all do. Initial and terminal brackets are structurally distinguishable in several ways. Initial brackets are often prefaced with initiating conjunctions, such as well or now, or the pseudo-imperative let and the imperative form of the

experiential verbs look, see, and listen. Initial brackets refer categorically to material coming next in the discourse, and any reference to that material is new information. Schiffrin quotes Goffman (1974) as saying that initiating brackets may be more important then terminal brackets, since they not only establish an episode but also a slot for signals which will indicate what sort of transformation is to be made of the material within the episode. Terminal brackets often use metalinguistic verbs such as tell, figure, put to indicate a reference time in the past, contain metalinguistic anaphoric reference, so the reference to that material is old information. Terminal brackets do less work than initial brackets. Speakers use such brackets to obtain permission from the hearers to go ahead and to establish in hearers a state of suspense concerning the next words.

Meta-talk not only organizes the structure of the discourse, but also evaluates the expressive aspects of what is being said. Phrases using the word opinion, are evaluative. Opinion identifies the speaker's stance toward what is being said. The phrase (That's my opinion) is evaluative because it relates a speaker to what he has been speaking about - it indicates his own evaluation of his position. Thus, this bracket not only has a metalingual, organizational function, but also has an emotive function. The function of some meta-talk intersects with that of "hedges" (words that work to make things fuzzier), according to Schiffrin. Some meta-talk, however, indicates strong convictions about the truth of the bracketed assertion. The bracket (I'll tell you) has an intensifying effect in that it points to and strengthens the proposition being expressed. Such intensification is a form of evaluation and a means of indicating the speakers' attitude towasrd what he is saying.

The evaluations directed to one's own utterances display a change in the speaker's alignment in relation to themselves. When speakers comment on their own talk through meta-talk, they are projected as an animator, Schiffrin notes. This is a different part of self, a part of self active in the role of utterance production. "Meta-talk allows a speaker to exercise control over the principal discourse at specific junctures during its production by projecting an animator who will bracket the expressive implications of what is being said."

In an empirical study, Vande Kopple (1980), found that metadiscourse, another term for meta-talk, is recalled at a level much below that of primary discourse proper. He selected several expository paragraphs that were either thematically or rhetorically linked, and added metadiscourse to the beginnings of at least one-half of the sentences in each paragraph. (The paragraphs had been used in earlier experiments investigating topic and stress relations to reading.) The additions were five or six word strings of metadiscourse added to the first, third, fifth and seventh sentences, such as It is my firm conclusion that, It has always been clear that, I can say without hesitation that, It is my private opinion that. These strings, then, became the main clause of the sentence, and the original main clause became a subordinate noun clause. Nineteen high-school sophomores read and recalled each paragraph. Subjects recalled few of the topics and stresses of the metadiscourse main clauses in each paragraph. Because the amount of metadiscourse recalled from rhetorically linked paragraphs (where sentence topics are remotely related) was close to the amount recalled from the thematically linked paragraphs, Vande Kopple argues tentatively that metadiscourse is processed on a level different from the level used for primary discourse. He explains that, if both kinds

of discourse were processed on the same level, the proven advantage of the thematically linked forms should have freed more mental energy for the metadiscourse processing. Rhetorically linked forms, because of the remotely related sentence topics, are more difficult to read and retain than the thematically linked forms, especially since once contiguous bits of old and new information were separated by metadiscourse, no doubt allowing for less mental energy on metadiscourse processing.

There were several limitations of this study. In this study, metadiscourse was not classified as to type. Some examples are informational and some are attitudinal. Some have an overt author and some do not. Furthermore, Vande Kopple was interested in investigating the retention of metadiscourse rather than retention of primary discourse, and he limited his primary discourse to paragraph length. The level of intensity for metadiscourse was extreme, with half the sentences in each paragraph having metadiscourse attached.

Text Characteristic Differences in Conventional and Unconventional Social Studies Texts

There are striking differences between conventional social studies texts and other books or articles on the same topic, but no one has studied the effect that these text characteristic differences might have on influencing retention of primary discourse in content area textbooks and attitudes of students toward the textbook and toward the content area itself. No one has investigated the question of whether a completely unconventional content area textbook, one with the text characteristics such as are found in popular non-textbook materials, might not be more comprehensible and more appealing to students and whether it might not stimulate an interest in them to read more widely in the subject area.

Examples from nontextbook social studies materials and conventional social studies illustrate the text characteristic differences.

Examples from Unconventional Nontextbook Social Studies Materials

1. There was a price, of course. An exception made for one lawbreaker could be made for another; if the frightened peddler could get off, so too could the swaggering tough . . . Perhaps they never took the time to make a balance sheet of their lives, those two old ones left alone, never stopped to reckon up how much they had gained and how much lost by coming. But certainly they must occasionally have faced the wry irony of their relationships with their offspring (Handlin, 1985).
2. As an artist, a sailor, and an amateur anthropologist, I had come to regard it (the voyaging canoe) as the finest artifact that the Polynesians had produced. . . . To me it seems no genetic accident that Polynesians, as a race, are large and powerful people. . . . I felt that if a voyaging canoe were built and sailed today, it would function as a cultural catalyst and inspire the revival of almost-forgotten aspects of Hawaiian life (Kane, 1979).
3. . . . The first chapter discusses the kinds of ideas people have of other groups of people. We believe that many Americans have an out-of-date and inaccurate picture of Indians. One way to change and broaden that picture is to understand more deeply both the past and present of America's Indians, and this is our goal in this book (Westbury & Westbury, 1975).

Examples from Conventional Social Studies Textbooks

1. Most of the major battles of the war were fought on two fronts. One was the area around Richmond and Washington. Each side tried to take

the other's capital. The other battleground was along the Mississippi River, where the Union tried to cut the Confederacy in half. Both sides had trouble getting soldiers, and both were hurt as thousands of soldiers deserted. But the Union, with its larger population, was hurt less (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; 1980). 2. In the guilds people learned to make fair rules about their work. And they learned to see that these rules were obeyed. Keeping women out of guilds did not help the growth of democracy. Yet making fair rules would some day include women. People were learning to make laws for a democracy (Dawson, Tiegs & Adams; 1979).

3. The great land of Brazil is north of the Plata countries. It is the largest Latin-American nation both in area and population. Its full name is the Federative Republic of Brazil. It has twenty-two separate states and four territories. Like the United States, Brazil has a Federal district where the capital city is located. What other Latin-American nation also has a separate Federal district for its capital city? (Cutwright & Durland, 1980)

Comparison of Text Characteristics

There are, of course, many differences between the two sets of examples just presented, because the conventional textbook examples were written for children and the unconventional nontextbooks were written for adults. Many text characteristic differences between the examples of conventional social studies textbook prose and the unconventional social studies prose could be discussed, but the ones pertinent to this discussion are the following, organized under four headings:

1. Authorship, author perspective and stance.

   a. The conventional textbooks appear not to be written by single or co-authors but by groups of authors, editors, and educational specialists.

   b. The unconventional texts appear to have real authors - single or co-authors who make their presence and personality felt in the text.

   c. The conventional textbooks have no author perspective or stance, perhaps because of the lack of authorship.

   d. The unconventional authors have perspectives and have taken a stance and make their biases known.

2. Scientific/Literary approach to social studies

   a. The conventional textbooks use a scientific, impersonal, fact-based approach to social studies.

   b. The unconventional texts use a more literary, descriptive, personal approach to social studies.

3. Metadiscourse (Discourse about Discourse)

   a. The conventional textbooks do not make informational comments to the reader about the discourse such as the goals, or attitudinal comments about the content of the assertions and statements in the discourse.

   b. The unconventional texts do comment on the act of discoursing and on the content.

The unconventional texts make much more use of the text characteristics called metadiscourse: (1) self-referential words such as I, me, we, and our; (2) emphatics and hedge words such as of course, after all, perhaps, certainly, seems, and words expressing opinions such as I had come to

regard it, it seems to me, I felt, we believe; (3) text plan phrases and clauses such as The first chapter discusses . . ., and that is the goal of our book. These words are the words used by social studies authors to express their personalities, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and to inform the readers about their intentions and plans for their text. The texts make use of both the informative, ideational functions of language and the interpersonal, evaluative functions of language. They have a warm, conversational quality but at the same time are not overly informal.

In contrast, the conventional text examples are written from the third person point of view and contain no self-reference, emphatics, hedges, or words expressing opinions. Nor do they use the informational metadiscourse to guide the reader as to the content and author plans. Social studies textbooks are written as though they were objective and scientific. The conventions for social studies textbooks make them unlike the more natural sounding unconventional social studies non-texts.

The examples should help illustrate some of the questions related to text characteristics involved in writing social studies materials which need to be studied.

1. What are the effects on students of text written from a subjective or objective point of view?
2. What are the effects of using first person pronouns, first person and second person pronouns, or third person pronouns? That is, should the author intrude overtly into the text with the reader being involved in a personal interaction with the author, or should the text simply be written as an encyclopedia presentation of impersonal facts?
3. What are the effects of having facts only, or both facts and opinions?

4. What are the effects of having an explicitly stated author perspective statement or thesis statement?

5. What are the effects of having evaluative words that express opinions about the truth conditions and content of the propositions in the text?

If we knew the answers to these questions, we would be in a better position to select an appropriate textbook style to accomplish instructional goals.

These questions concerning the nature of the language used in textbooks, the lack of author identifiability, and lack of guidance for the reader through the use of informational and attitudinal discoursing about the discourse are extremely important questions. If educators and publishers intend for textbooks not only to survive but also to increase in use and effectiveness, then some fundamental changes may need to take place concerning the notion of what a content area textbook should be. It may be that the present social studies textbooks, because of certain text characteristics, are detrimental to some students. On the other hand, adding metadiscourse may prevent some students from developing study skills, such as finding the main idea independently. It is also possible that an innovative textbook with metadiscourse and interpersonal voice may be needed as a temporary coping device for students as they make the transition from narrative to expository texts.

An experimental study of the type called for by Michael Kane, Senior Editor of Ginn and Company, in a response to criticisms of content area textbooks by several researchers (Anderson, Armbruster, & Kantor, 1980), is necessary to help clarify the questions and issues and provide some useful information to educators and textbook publishers. One goal could be to

study the effect of certain rhetorical characteristics of text by writing different versions of a social studies textbook chapter, manipulating the variables, and investigating the effect these variables made on retention of information and attitudes toward the subject matter. The problem in carrying out such a study, however, is that although reading researchers have benefited a great deal from different disciplines such as educational psychology, linguistics, and pragmatics, the kinds of issues, questions, and text characteristics discussed previously have not been looked at properly from any one discipline. It is important to note that many of the issues are outside and beyond educational psychology. Because educational psychology is uninformed by classical and contemporary rhetorical theory and certain aspects of literary theory, it would be necessary to draw on these disciplines, as well as theory and research from educational psychology, linguistics, and pragmatics. Rhetorical theory has to do with the study of effective communication, and all pedagogical theories (no matter what the medium for the pedagogy) and all literary theories are subbranches of rhetorical theory.

A hypothesis for a proposed study is that certain rhetorical characteristics of textbooks will make a difference quantitatively and qualitatively in the way students learn from and react to content area textbooks. The research would explore the effects which the level of discourse called metadiscourse has on (1) what information about propositional content, text plans, and authorial stance is understood, remembered, and used from the passage presented, (2) the level of interest in the subject matter and attitudes toward the text and author which children show after reading the text, and (3) the level of anxiety for social studies reading and writing and the interactions among the variables.

Importance of the Study

Such a study would be important for several reasons. Some recent research has investigated the effects of various text characteristics on enhancing attention, organization, comprehension and recall of text. But there is little or no research on the effects on the readers' attitudes or interest in the text and in the subject matter, or the students' level of anxiety for the subject matter or domain. First, this kind of study would investigate both cognitive and affective effects on readers of types of metadiscourse and voice on text characteristics. Second, this study would go beyond the usual issues concerned with text processing in that it would investigate the old (but still very relevant and highly controversial) issue of subjectivity in texts. It would investigate the effect of an overt author in a text on readers. Third, it would investigate content area textbook prose, specifically social studies textbook prose. Much of the current reading research deals with narrative texts rather than expository texts, yet reading and remembering expository prose seems to be a difficult task for many chidren, including many who perform well with narrative prose. Children's lack of critical reading skills for evaluating facts and opinions, and negative attitudes toward expository prose, are serious problems in schools today. Finally, the study would investigate the text characteristic metadiscourse, an area where almost no research has been done yet.

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